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## Bad may turn to worse for California adult schools

Mar 24, 2011

Cynthia E. Griffin | OW Co-Editor

### Compton slated for closure

In the 31 years she has worked at the Compton Adult School, Saundra Bishop says this is the worst financial situation the program has faced.

"Bar none. It's the worst time for education period, but adult education specifically and other categorical programs in general," said the longtime director of the Compton Adult School.

Bishop said the hardships began during the 2008-09 fiscal year. In response to the state budget crises, then-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger funded adult education and other categorical programs at the 2007-08 revenue levels minus about 20 percent.

Additionally, according to Mike Wada, president of the California Council on Adult Education (CCA), for decades the legislature identified pots of money they wanted set aside for specific protected programs such as adult education.

During the recent state budget crises, Wada said that the "fire wall" between programs like adult education and the rest of the state education budget came down for about four years.

Wada noted that in many instances, school districts were forced into the difficult position of choosing between educating children or their parents. "Since their mission was kids, (many) took the money to support kindergarten-12 education, disseminating adult programs."

The adult education block grant statewide is \$630 million, and Wada said about 60 percent of that has been diverted away from adult education and back into funding K-12 programs.

In the Compton Unified School District, diversion has morphed into the total closure of the program. Bishop said this will free up \$3.784 million (the program's budget).

But there is a human cost that must be attached to those numbers. There are 60 certificated employees (i.e. teachers), and 45 classified workers (clerks, janitors, etc.) and various student workers who will lose their jobs, if the program closes.

Additionally, in its better years such as 2008-09, the school served 8,000 to 10,000 students compared with a little more than 5,000 last year.

"These are students who did not get their high school diplomas, when they were in the K-12 system," explained Bishop. "Now they are earning their high school diplomas or a GED. There are English as a Second Language students (about one-third), students with disabilities (developmental and visual) as

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well as job training and re-training programs."

Bishop called the job training survival educational offerings—certified nurse/home healthcare, business tech, pharmacy tech, as well as medical billing and coding.

"There are also domestic violence prevention and anger management courses for those people who are remanded by the courts to take the classes."

Although its adult education has been hit hard by budget cuts, the Antelope Valley Union High School is not considering closing its program, said Mark Bryant, assistant superintendent of personnel.

The school serves 4,000 to 5,000 students annually and has a budget of about \$2.3 million budget, including \$250,000 to \$300,000 in federal grants.

According to Terry O'Connor, principal of the Antelope Valley Adult School, 25-30 percent of students attending the campus are working on a high school diploma or GED, 25 to 30 percent are in the English as a Second Language program and the balance are taking career technical education courses in information technology and medical/healthcare. Others are in adult basic education, which prepares students to take GED courses.

O'Connor said that among the impacts the ongoing state budget crisis has had on his school is to force them to cut the number of course hours offered, and forgo growth by transferring their \$2 million surplus to the school district. Additionally, the program's leaders have learned how to operate with less money, and fewer resources.

Adult education is a sort of survival education statewide as well, believes Wada, noting that about 600,000 people take advantage of the programs in California, down from 1.2 million, when the program was last fully funded (about two years ago.)

The short-term impact of these continuing cuts, said Wada, is that the "infrastructure of adult education is being destroyed, because teachers are looking for new jobs or retiring, and the facilities that were used for adult education are gone."

Additionally, while the trend is for people to go to school for more training or re-training in tough economic times, these cuts and others mean the resources may not be there to help residents upgrade their skill and be better prepared for the job world.

Long-term, Wada said, it means no options for those looking for that beacon of light to make a better life.

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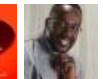
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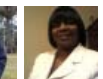
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